Bishop Burch, New Head of Episcopal Diocese

Succeeds Bishop Greer—A Former Newspaper Editor

By Percy T. Edrop

BISHOP CHARLES SUMNER BURCH, who has just been elected to succeed the late Right Rev. David Hummel Greer, is one of the most picturesque personalities in the American Church. He entered the ministry so late in life that those who opposed him for the office of diocesan protested that his preparation for the work of supervising the most important diocese in America was inadequate.

He is a very human man. Many years of service in newspaper work have taught him things about human nature that are not learned from books. He is scholarly, dignified, yet not too much so; eloquent in speech, thoroughly pious, and a real leader of men.

His election came as a surprise to many of the delegates to the convention, who had looked upon his nomination as a mere complimentary matter on account of the fact that he was already in the episcopate. Most men that did not vote for him felt that his election was impossible. Some of them even went so far as to say that they felt sorry for him. There seemed to have been a preconceived idea that a suffragan bishop would not succeed to the post of diocesan in New York. His election to the suffragan's post did not qualify him to succeed automatically to the bishopric of the diocese; some of the clergy felt that it actually disqualified him. They held that his elevation would be establishing a precedent that would strike at the heart of the suffragan principle.

In the Protestant Episcopal Church practice, two classes of assistant bishops can be elected. One is a coadjutor, who is elected according to the old formula, cum jure successiones, or with the right of succession; the other class is of bishops suffragan, who are merely assistants and do not automatically succeed. Bishop Burch was elected as a suffragan. He was an intimate friend of Bishop Greer, and it was upon his predecessor's suggestion that he was chosen from a historic, but relatively obscure, Staten Island parish.

The Country Churches

Upon the death of Bishop Greer the clergymen of the rural parishes and their associated lay delegates showed strong evidences of their desire for the elevation of Bishop Burch. His work had been largely among the parishes outside of the city. He had endeared himself to the people of the country churches. For some time the rural churches had been advocating a diocese of their own. It was felt that the city of New York was a diocese large enough of itself to tax the capacity of any bishop, no matter how strong physically. In addition, there was a desire for self-determination.

Bishop Burch had long been advocated for the bishopric of the proposed diocese. But the people of the rural churches felt that his elevation to the bishopric of the present diocese would be a happy compromise. It was almost a certainty that he would be given a suffragan, or a coadjutor; and it was felt that he was intimately acquainted with the needs of the rural churches, so that they would always have a "friend at court."

Several meetings of the clergy and laity were held and there was some quite informal canvassing in Bishop Burch's behalf. The rural parishes went into the convention almost a unit for the suffragan; and their unity elected him.

It is an axiom among churchmen that a vote of the laity "sticks." Clergymen are supposed to be stubborn; but laymen who are interested in church matters are traditionally more so. The first ballot showed a clear majority of the laity for Bishop Burch and one shrewd delegate said, "It is Bishop Burch or a deadlock. You can't change the lay vote."

His prophecy was fulfilled. The two succeeding ballots showed that Bishop Burch held his lead among the laity, and that the sheer force of that majority swung the clergy to his support.

When the news of the election was formally announced there was a spontaneous outburst of applause. Dr. Ernest M. Stires, rector of St. Thomas's Church, and Dr. William T. Manning, rector of Trinity Parish, both rose to move that the election be made unanimous. This was done in a storm of applause.

Dr. Stires, who led among the candidates opposing Bishop Burch, said immediately after the passing of the motion:

"The action of this convention is an illustration of the operation of Divine wisdom. Many of us had our personal preferences. The election of any of the other candidates at this time might have led to differences, any of them unimportant in itself, but taken as a whole, a force against unity. Now the interests of the diocese will be conserved, and we shall go forward to do a grand work."

So Bishop Burch came to be elected to sit in the chair of the prelate at whose feet he had sat as a pupil for more than nine years.

The Man Himself

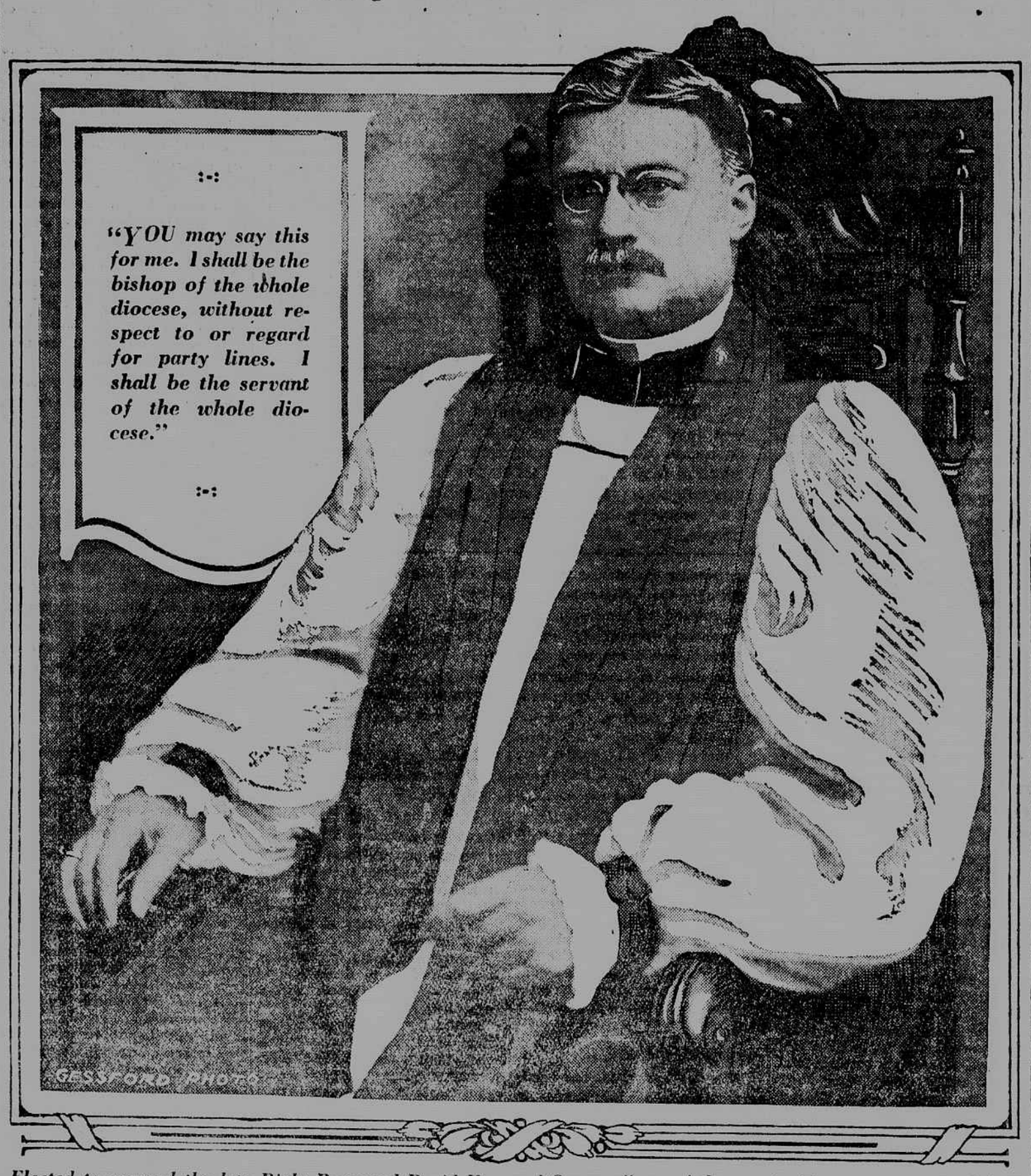
Now for a study of the personality of the new bishop of the diocese.

He stands more than six feet. He is big in proportion. His great size cannot help but impress you at the start. In church processions he towers above most of his associates.

Except for his manner of dress there is nothing about him to suggest the ecclesiastic. His face suggests a successful business man. His manner is thoroughly ministerial in its urbanity. But there is an enthusiasm about his greetings, a rare personal note in his dealings, even with people whom he has seen only once or twice, that are thoroughly Rooseveltian. On the day of his election he stood on the platform at Synod Hall and leaned over, greeting those who felicitated him in a manner that made even the newspaper men recall the former President.

Bishop Burch, in that half hour or so when he was receiving the greetings of his constituents, betrayed the secret of his success. In addition to an unusual equipment of training and education he has that rare faculty for making friends. There is something so interested in his greetings that no one leaves his presence without feeling that he has a friend in the bishop. All through the rural parishes Bishop Burch has gone during the last nine years, making new friends with every Episcopal visitation, spending a night with this family of communicants, or having dinner with another. The cumulative effect of all this was the united support he received in the diocesan convention from the parishes he had ministered to as bishop. Yet Bishop Burch never made a move for his own election. He did not set about his visitations with the idea of building up a political machine. The bishop looks with the utmost contempt on ecclesiastical politics. "I know nothing of it, except to disdain it. I have had no part in it and I will have no part in it," he said to the newspaper men after his election.

Bishop Charles Sumner Burch



Elected to succeed the late Right Reverend David Hummel Greer—"one of the most picturesque personalities in the American Church"

"Be Merciful!"

Remembering his own career, the bishop consented to make things easy for the news writers. As soon as he could, after his election, he withdrew to the privacy of the bishop's own offices and said, "Now be merciful." Then he told the reporters to ask all the questions that came to their minds. For an hour and a half he withstood their grilling. One reporter asked utterly irrelevant and even impertinent questions. But the bishop answered every one without a show of impatience. In that hour and a half he showed qualities of restraint that are declared to be most desirable in a churchman.

Bishop Burch is a man of unusual modesty. The formal publications, like "Who's Who in America," give the sketchiest of outlines of his career. It seemed impossible that he should have been elevated to the bishopric of the most important diocese in America with such a brief service in the actual ministry as these records show.

Understand that the bishop only a few minutes before had received word of his election. He was laboring under the emotions of the moment. He had not even seen Mrs. Burch to receive her congratulations. He had been given no opportunity to withdraw for private prayer. As one question after another was asked, the bishop would hesitate and say, "Well, you'll have to let me figure that out." Once he said, "I can't remember just at this moment when I was ordained." Then he sat for a moment or two in deep thought. "Now I have it," he said, and he proceeded to outline the whole story of his ministry. He followed it chronologically to the years leading to his call to the Staten Island church. Then he stopped a moment and said, "You see I have my dates a little confused. I'll have to retrace some of my steps." Finally the bishop had every year of his life accounted for. He was in a perspiration by this time and hailed with the glee of a boy the announcement of the newspaper men that, having once set them straight, he would now have the story of his life put in cold type, that would be available for all future biographers.

The interview took place in the room occupied by Bishop Greer as his private office. "I have never occupied this room since the death of Bishop Greer," said the new diocesan. "There was a sentimental reason. I tried to have it arranged so that the room would not be disturbed until a successor had actually been elected. Only on occasions of conferences that could not be accommodated anywhere else has any one been here."

His Policy

The bishop began his statement with this remark about his policy: "I can't outline any distinctive policies except to say that I shall endeavor to carry out, as far as in me lies, the policies of my beloved predecessor, who was my co-laborer for nine years. If I can even measurably reach his position and work I shall be one of the happiest of men.

"There will be no radical changes. I am not a radical. I shall seek only to serve the best interests of the church.

"You may say this for me. I shall be the bishop of the whole diocese, without respect to or regard for party lines. I shall be the servant of the whole diocese."

The bishop was asked about the great Cathedral of St. John the Divine, projected by the late Bishop Potter and completed as far as the nave and crossing, with some small chapels, under Bishop Potter's administration and that of Bishop Greer.

"I am very eager to see that nave begun and finished. It is a huge undertaking, and I will do my best to uphold the arms of the dean and the trustees who are charged with the duty of finishing the building."

Then the bishop began to answer questions as to his career in the ministry. "There seems to have been some confusion in the minds of certain people as to my preparation. It has been stated that I am not qualified for this office because my term of service in the actual ministry has not been of long duration. I am going to tell you men the whole story, and to tell it fully, in the hope that I shall not have to do so again.

"I was born in Michigan. My birth in that state was an accident—I mean by that it was an accident that I was not a New Yorker. My family is a New York state family. The date of my birth—I suppose you want all the particulars—was June 30, 1855. I was graduated from the University of Michigan with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1875. While at the university I was college correspondent for a daily newspaper. This brought me into the first contact with your own craft.

"After graduation I taught school for two years in Detroit. Then I went to Chicago and engaged in the publishing business. This business was a family affair. Two of my brothers were interested, too. At this time my thoughts began to turn definitely to the ministry. I became a postulant for holy orders and matriculated at the Western Theological Seminary, one of the schools of this church.

"All this time I was actively engaged in work for the church and much interested in missions. Wherever I lived, I made it a point to devote myself to the work of the mission that most needed my help.

"Then I went to Grand Rapids, where I worked as manager and editor of 'The Evening News' from 1897 to 1904, during which time I was a deacon, having been so ordered in 1895. I worked in two of the parishes, and, in fact, it was the prospect of a great work among newsboys that took me to Grand Rapids in the first place.

Helping Newsies

"It was a great work. There were twelve hundred newsboys, some no longer active in that work, who were ministered to by the mission and its club. We finally erected a large building for the boys, and it was splendidly equipped. I forgot to tell you that years before I had been, for a brief time, at Christ Church, New Brighton; and at St. John's, Clifton.

"While I was at Grand Rapids, I received an urgent call to return to Staten Island. It came from St. Andrew's Church, a delightful old parish, founded in the reign of Queen Anne and chartered by her. In all this time I had not been advanced to priests' orders. But still I was called as rector of the parish, and it became necessary for me to be priested. It was nearly eighteen months after I received the call before I finally returned to Staten Island.

"And now comes the chapter in my life that people are saying moves too quickly. One year after I was settled as rector on Staten Island I was made archdeacon. Four years later—four years after I had been priested—I was elected suffragan bishop of this diocese.

"But I leave it to you gentlemen to say whether I have not had as long a service in the ministry as the average man who is elected to a bishopric. Practically my whole life has been given to the service of the church."

Following Bishop Greer

The bishop was asked about the installation services. "I want to tell you about Bishop Greer," he said. "When he succeeded to the post to which I have been elected I was in England, taking a special course at Oxford University. On the morning after his succession, occasioned by the death of Bishop Potter, to whom he had been coadjutor, Bishop Greer saw me and informed me of his succession. The announcement to the others of his clergy was made in much the same fashion as it was made to me. There was no formal service, and I would prefer to slip into the office just as quietly. Of course there is a difference in my case. I was not the coadjutor, and I have just been elected. So it may be that there will be a great service in the cathedral. It shall be as the diocese wills. You ask me as to the nature of this service. It is just an institution—some call it an enthronement; but that is such a pretentious word.

"I would like to say this: that my election at this time will mean a seat for the diocese in the House of Bishops at the important general convention in Detroit next month. Had one of the rector-candidates been elected, there would have been a vacancy so far as New York is concerned, because it would have been impossible to secure the necessary consents and to consecrate the new bishop before the opening of the convention. Being already a bishop, I do not have to be consecrated, and the general convention, as a courtesy, proceeds early to the formal ratification of elections so that dioceses may be represented in the House of Bishops."

Bishop Burch is married and has a son and daughter. His daughter is, and has been throughout the war, in charge of a Red Cross unit in Serbia. She is Mrs. Grace Burch Walkup. His son, Albert C. Burch, is in business in Detroit.

In addition Mr. and Mrs. Burch have an adopted son, who is known as Lindon C. Burch.

The new Bishop's leaning toward newspaper work and publishing was quite natural. His father was a writer of note. His name was Lawrence D. Burch.

Six institutions of learning have honored Bishop Burch with doctor's degrees. He has received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Columbia University, the University of the South, Hobart College and St. John's College, Maryland. He holds the degree of Doctor of Laws from his alma mater, the University of Michigan, and the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from St. Stephen's College, Annandale, N. Y. At most of these colleges he preached the baccalaureate sermon on the occasion of his being admitted to the honorary degree.

His Diocese

By his election as diocesan Bishop Burch becomes the spiritual ruler of a diocese that has 90,000 communicants. This does not by any means represent the number of persons ministered to. The communicants are those that have been confirmed and are regularly admitted to church membership after having "arrived at the years of discretion." There are thousands in the diocese active in the various parishes that have not been confirmed; and the record does not take into any account the baptized children.

Under his immediate jurisdiction will be church properties valued at more than $100,000,000, of which $30,000,000 is represented in a single parish, Trinity.

There are 428 clergy directly responsible to him.

The diocese embraces 5,500 square miles in Manhattan, The Bronx and Richmond boroughs and Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Westchester and Sullivan counties.

As bishop of the diocese he will receive a stipend of $15,000 a year, raised by parish assessments. His home will be the bishop's residence on the Cathedral close.

The bishop, by virtue of his office, becomes a trustee of Columbia University and of the General Theological Seminary and, in the course of the next few weeks, will be elected to many other posts of trust.

Slumming in the Days of Peisistratos the Tyrant

ANOTHER proof of the old adage, "There is nothing new under the sun," has been unearthed recently by an English writer, R. M. Freeman. Most of us are apt to think that eugenic experts, settlement workers and visiting nurses are modern twentieth century inventions. Not by any means. They were known 2,500 years ago, in the Athens of the tyrant Peisistratos, who ruled in the sixth century B. C. This, at least, is the testimony of a story translated by R. M. Freeman from the Greek of Gasides Alexandrinus, and published in "The Westminster Gazette," as follows:

"Peisistratos, the tyrant of Athens, having many vices, was nevertheless not without virtues, of which one was his solicitude for the welfare of infants in the city. But these, until his day, had never been considered by the ruling powers, nor was anything done to insure their being properly reared and tended, but their mothers were left to manage, or mismanage, them at will, so that many perished needlessly every year. Moreover, of those that survived not a few were so puny, stunted or deformed that there was no hope of their ever growing up into healthy citizens.

"Peisistratos, then, observing this, and foreseeing that, in default of some remedy, Athens would soon become a city of weaklings, the prey of any rival, determined to take the matter in hand without delay (1).

"To that end, after careful thought, he appointed certain officers, both men and women, whom he named Nepiarchs, to go round to the mothers of Athens and teach them to rear their infants in the proper way.

"Which seemed, indeed, a wise scheme and likely to have the best results. But so perverse were some of the mothers of Athens that, in their case, the teaching of the Nepiarchs proved worse than futile.

"For if the visitor, being a woman, should address any of these perverse mothers thus:

"'See here! If you will feed that tender infant on hog's flesh rather than on milk, either your own or at least goat's milk, how can you expect it not to ail?'

"The mother, as likely as not, would flare up and answer:

"'I have not brought up ten infants for nothing—thanking you all the same. Moreover, did you never hear what befell the louse that took upon herself to teach the flea how to jump?' (2).

"So, for these and other reasons, the scheme of Peisistratos failed in many cases where success was most needed, and he fell into great perplexity how to deal with the matter.

"But Gynækosophias, the priest of Æsculapius, hearing of the perplexity of Peisistratos, went to him and said:

"'Make me a Nepiarch, and, I believe, I shall know what to do.'

"So Peisistratos, seeing that, at the worst, no harm could come of it, made him a Nepiarch.

"Whereupon Gynækosophias took up his task without delay, and this to such good effect that within a few months there was an extraordinary change for the better among the infants of hitherto perverse mothers; so that from being unwashed, ill-fed, neglected and puny weaklings, they became as plump and sleek as little prize pigs, with healthy rolls of fat about their necks, and their small bodies as firm to touch as full wine skins.

"And this was rightly deemed a wonderful achievement of the Nepiarch. But how he had done it none knew.

"Peisistratos, therefore, sent for him and inquired of the matter.

"To whom Gynækosophias:

"'O Peisistratos,' said he, 'even now I am on my way to visit a certain mother, Drabia, the wife of Ameletes, who lives on the road to Phaleron. And if you accompany me you may learn something.'

"So they set out together. And when they had come to the house and knocked on the door, it was opened to them by an unkempt woman of morose aspect, who demanded of them sourly what they wanted.

"'Nothing very particular, to say the truth,' answered Gynækosophias. 'Only being a Nepiarch and having to pass this way, it occurred to me that I might as well have a look at your little freak of a last born—if, indeed, he is at all worth looking at' (5).

"Whereat she, instantly on fire: 'Worth looking at, do you say? By Pollux! But I would like to see the man or woman that should dare tell me otherwise.'

"'I have heard strange stories of his extraordinary ugliness,' said he. 'But that may be only the jealousy of the women who told me. However, if you will let me in this can quickly be settled.'

"Then she flung the door wide, through which the Nepiarch entered, followed by Peisistratos. And there in a cradle, on a heap of rags, lay Drabia's infant, sadly neglected and unwashed, so that its little visage was incrusted with the grime and stickiness of several days.

"'I know what you are thinking,' said Drabia, eying the Nepiarch defiantly. 'You are thinking he would look better if I washed his face.'

"'Oh! the Gods forbid—poor little goblin!' protested Gynækosophias with great earnestness. 'For it would be unkind indeed to remove the merciful mask of dirt from such a face.'

"Whereupon the mother, in high indignation:

"'If there is another infant's face in Athens half so beautiful, may I be a Theban.'

"(For the Theban women have the ungainliest forms of any in Hellas.)

"'That is as may be,' said he. 'Nevertheless, if you have any regard for Athens and the coming race, there is really only one thing to do with him.'

"'And what is that?' demanded Drabia, fiercely.

"'To smother him,' replied Gynækosophias.

"So saying, he seized Peisistratos by the arm and drew him swiftly from the house before the infuriated mother had time to spring on them.

"'By Herakles!' cried the tyrant, 'but if we had remained a moment longer I believe that lioness would have clawed our eyes out.'

"'It is very likely, O Peisistratos,' said the Nepiarch, smiling. 'These mothers are very savage when provoked. And I had to provoke her to arouse her maternal instincts. That is my method, you see. For in dealing with a perverse person one has to begin perversely. And, after all, there are quite a number of women like that.

"'If you want to get them to Corinth the one and only way is to push them toward Larissa.'"